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A Season To Remember: Armstrong Men's Cross Country Finishes Season Strong

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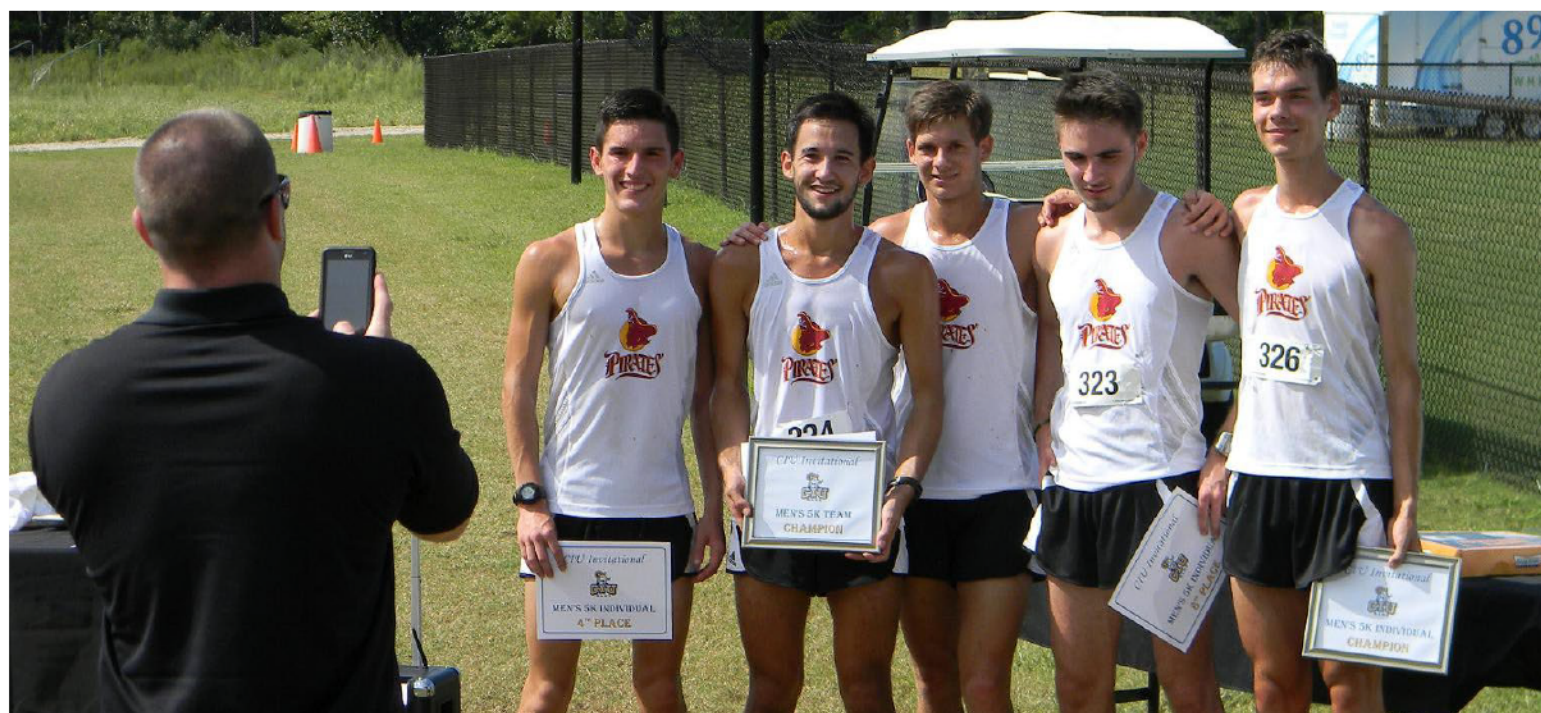


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A Season To Remember: Armstrong Men's Cross Country Finishes Season Strong



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SAVANNAH, Ga. - For other intercollegiate sports, running is considered punishment. For the sport of cross country, however, running -is- the sport. And for the Armstrong State University men's cross country team, the future of running is bright.

When Armstrong reinstated the sport of men's cross country in 2009, the Pirates have looked to become a strong presence in the conference and the region that they had when the sport was dropped in 1999. For the last two years, the Pirates have been in that mix of the Peach Belt Conference, finishing sixth in 2013 and then fifth in 2014. "Having cross country back has been a positive for our athletic department," Armstrong athletic director Lisa Sweany said.

A big part of that presence started with the hiring of head coach Michael Sergi, who brought with him a winning tradition from cross-town Savannah College of Art and Design. Hired in 2012, Sweany knew that Sergi was the right person for the

job from his success at SCAD. "The team needed discipline and structure," Sweany said. "And coach Sergi has a plan that works well."

A graduate of Armstrong State, Sergi received his master's degree in sports medicine from the school he now works at in 2007. Similar to when he started at SCAD, Sergi knew he would be starting from the ground up. He has taken that opportunity head on and is very optimistic for the future. "The opportunities for runners in our program have improved, and as a result we have improved as a program," Sergi said.

The roster for the Pirates in 2014 consisted of three freshman and three sophomores, making Sergi believe that youth will be a great asset next season. The experience gained this season will be invaluable and will be very important heading into 2015.

Part of that experience was successes, both individually and as a team, that Armstrong had for the first time since reinstatement of the program. Armstrong captured their first team title since reinstatement by winning the Columbia International University Invite in Columbia, S.C., in September. Freshman **Henning Schein** was named the PBC's Freshman of the Year and placed in the Top 10 at the PBC Championships and in the Top 25 at the NCAA Southeast Regionals.

Sophomore **Donald Shelton**, junior **Alex Martinez** and sophomore **Guillaume Corneloup** all set personal bests during the season as well and all of the returners for coach Sergi will look to put that experience to use in challenging for the Peach Belt Conference title in 2015.

That goal is a lofty one and the Pirates know it will not be easy, but with hard work and time, the goal is attainable. "They have a tremendous nucleus coming back," Sweany said. "They will continue to build on what they have already attained in a short period of time."

The key, according to coach Sergi, is finding both leadership and consistency from all of his runners. "It's crucial that the juniors we have, use their experience as confidence going into races next season," Sergi said. "Consistency is the big for our team right now."

With the great amount of improvement in a short period of time, there is still more work to be done. Coach Sergi and the Pirates know how important that improvement is for such a young team, and this year's accomplishments should be a great confidence booster going into 2015.

(Patrick Mastrianni is a contributor to armstrongpirates.com. You can reach him at patrick.mastrianni@gmail.com)



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